

Philippians 4:5–9 (NKJV)

(5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.) **6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.**

There are a couple of things I want to point out in the context.

First is the use of so many **absolutes**.

Be anxious for **nothing**, not a single thing.

But in **Everything**, every single thing, give your requests.

We need to remove any doubt that would say that this advice is only for times when things are **generally pretty good** but we are tempted to **think badly** about it. No, Paul is talking about every day all day.

So when we face life differently than what He commands, we are doing it wrongly. When we face life like he says to do it, we are facing it rightly. No matter what our circumstances.

There are many ways to look at this text. We could be discouraged because obeying Paul's commands is so hard to do. Maybe we have failed to do it over and over again. Well guess what. Today is a new start. Today we have new mercies. And the wonderful glorious thing about this is if Paul **commands** it, this is **available** to us. It is **attainable**, at least for periods of time. Never perfectly. So lets look at this scripture as opportunity to be freed from the burden of **anxious thoughts** that lead to **anxious feelings**. Now those feelings of anxiety that **cannot** be tracked to things we think about may simply be a burden we need to bear for seasons in our lives, while still directing our minds to heaven. We cannot control our feelings, but we are commanded to control our thinking.

The second focus is the **need** for peace and the **importance** of peace.

Vs 7 **the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds**

Vs 9 **and the God of peace will be with you.**

As always we need to define our terms.

What is peace? One definition is the **absence of enmity**. Peace may be easier to define by looking at its opposite. Enmity.

Have you ever had a fight with your spouse where you wondered how in the world you would ever reconcile your differences? I have heard that this happens in most marriages.

What do you find?

First there is **positional** enmity. You are standing against each other on a position. There is a dispute. There is conflict. There is something against something. There is a lack of good standing between two people for something that has at least some basis in perceived or real truth.

And then what else is there?

There is the accompanying **feeling** that things are not ok. There is that feeling in the pit of your stomach that this is not a state you want to be in. It is unsettling. It is depriving you of the **OK** ness. You just want the enmity to go away.

Then we develop strategies to either **resolve** the conflicts or to **placate** them.

Because what we really desperately want is peace.

We want both the knowledge and the accompanying feeling that all is ok between us. We want the feeling that we are in good standing with the other party.

That peace is the goal that Paul has in mind for us. That peace is where God wants us to live and where we want to quickly revert back to when we stray from the course.

God wants us to have restored fellowship so that we can experience the feelings of being OK in our relationship to God.

Remember that our **position** is already one of peace. Even while we were enemies in position, Christ died for us. And His work brought us over from being His enemy to being His child. So our **position** is good. He is committed to our relationship. But that does not mean our **fellowship** with God is always good.

There are times when we grieve God. There are times that we are **not ok** in our relating to God. There are times when we create distance between us and God. And eventually that deeply bothers us. It creates stuff in our lives that is not good.

That is not God's desire for us. He wants to restore the **"OK"** ness. He wants us to feel the comfort of His beloved sheep being cared for by its shepherd. Or the chick being covered by the hens feathers.

I think the peace spoken of here might best be displayed by the song "It is well with my soul." That is the heart of peace. The position of **no enmity** experienced

in the feelings of **well being**. It is the position of greatest spiritual productivity since we are most closely reliant upon a God who loves us.

Now, who of us is going to say, no. **I don't want that**. I want my life to be in turmoil all the time. I want to experience my life as if I am completely at the mercy of the events that happen around me. I want the apparent chaos to keep my life off kilter all the time. I don't want that security of being deeply loved by someone who only wants **my best** all the time.

The idea is ludicrous that we would **not want that**. But sometimes we do not want to pay the price **to have it**. We don't want to do the hard work that Paul is going to lay in front of us today. And rest assured, your flesh will not **help you do** what Paul tells us to do.

Now keep in mind that the Philippians are facing persecution. As we see so many changes around us in the political landscape, we may be thinking **the same things** the Philippians were thinking. Maybe we are thinking the **same way** they were thinking. Paul is commanding them to obey what God wants done instead.

6 Be anxious for nothing,

To be anxious means to be anxious, to be troubled with cares. This is certainly not referring to every hurtful or painful emotion. When we love each other we mourn with each other. We feel the pain they experience to some degree. There are lots of examples in scripture where deep concern is shown as being something Godly. No what Paul is referring to is more specific.

This is **fretting**. This is the worry about **current** or possible **future** life circumstances that we fear or are simply disturbed about.

This isn't the first time we have looked at worry.

I know this text is long but it is long because it is so important.

Matthew 6:25–34 (NKJV)

25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?'

or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

It is impossible for us to believe, with all the ink Jesus gave to the topic, that it is ok for us to continue to fret and worry and be anxious.

Now why is it so important?

Dennis Johnson from the Reformed Expository Commentary says it well I think.

Paul meets us at every turn with a reminder of the God of grace because he knows that our anxiety is not merely the product of poor coping strategies. It is symptomatic of misplaced trust. Anxiety shows that our hearts are so set on something that we are terrified of losing it, desperate to hold onto it for dear life. That “something” that we cannot bear to lose is our heart’s foundation, its “center of gravity.” Even good things—love, family, knowledge, success—cannot last through thick and thin because they are creaturely and finite. In his 2009 book Counterfeit Gods, Pastor Timothy Keller told recession-terrified New Yorkers (and the rest of us) that what we worry about is symptomatic of the counterfeit gods that we instinctively count on, though we sense uneasily that those idols cannot bear the weight of our hopes. Keller says:

“Anything that becomes more important and nonnegotiable to us than God becomes an enslaving idol. In this paradigm, we can locate idols by looking at our most unyielding emotions. What makes us uncontrollably angry, anxious, or despondent?... Idols control us, since we feel we must have them or life is meaningless.”

On the other hand, those who trust in Christ can face every threat and wound that this twisted world can inflict—“tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword,” death and life, things present and things to come, or “anything else in all creation”—because we are assured that nothing can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35–39). Refocusing on your faithful Lord, treasuring Jesus and his grace as your life’s foundation imparts joy and gentleness, enabling us to combat worry by praying with gratitude, by pondering Christ’s character, and by practicing the pattern of gospel-shaped conduct.

I could not imagine a way I could have said it better than that. The greatest problem with anxiety is that it displays what our heart of hearts really thinks

about God and what we value more highly than Him and our relationship with Him.

When we fret like the world frets, we are testifying to them that our true God is **no better** than their false god, whatever it might be.

You and I are going to have more and more opportunities to display our rock solid trust in Christ in the days and years ahead. That may provide some very powerful witnessing opportunities that we would never get in years of prosperity. If we will face life with a solid trust that Christ will provide for us, that is going to be noticeable as the climate of fear grows around us.

John MacArthur also says this

People become worried, anxious, and fearful because they do not trust in God's wisdom, power, or goodness. They fear that God is not wise enough, strong enough, or good enough to prevent disaster. It may be that this sinful doubt is because their knowledge of Him is faulty, or that sin in their lives has crippled their faith. Thankful prayer brings release from fear and worry, because it affirms God's sovereign control over every circumstance, and that His purpose is the believer's good (Rom. 8:28).

We can easily see why Paul singled out this condition and lets us know that we cannot stay in that condition. It is forbidden to remain there.

So we say, ok, how? How can I change? How can I stop being anxious? How can I deal with this serious issue?

Well Jesus actually gave us a lot more content in that regard. We covered that in great depth a few years ago. But Paul gives us a whole lot in a couple of verses to help in the process.

but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

The but tells us that Paul is telling us the **counter** to maintaining anxious thoughts. He gives us the solution. It is to pray.

The words used for **prayer** and **supplication** and **requests** don't have all that clear of a distinction. It's like saying whenever you face anything, pray any way you want to. If you want to talk to God, do that. If you want to petition specific requests and linger on those, go ahead. If you want to ask for what you think you might need, feel free to. But go to **God** instead of going into your head. In everything, run to God. In everything trust God. In everything unburden to God. In everything believe that God hears you and will do good to you. In everything run to God.

Why wouldn't we run to God? Like Mr. MacArthur said-

They fear that God is not wise enough, strong enough, or good enough to prevent disaster.

Which is the lie we believe that keeps us from running to God in prayer when facing great uncertainty?

Do we really, in our heart of hearts believe that God **actually knows** what He is doing?

Do we really, in our heart of hearts believe that God **can accomplish any good thing** that He desires for us?

And do we really, in our heart of hearts believe that God **really deeply loves us**, even when he brings things into our lives that deeply hurt us.

How often do we feel like we are a **victim** of worry, of anxiety that is a result of our thinking, like it is something that just **happens to us**? Like we should be pitied because we are so fretful? God never describes it that way. God describes it as unbelief. It is a personal affront to Him. He does not placate it. He does not pity it. He commands that we **stop doing it**.

Peter talked about this impulse to run to God in a different circumstance. But the impulse was the same and for the same reason.

1 Peter 5:6–7 (NKJV) says this.

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

This is the same idea. Run to God. Why? No one could possibly care for you **more** or **better** or more **powerfully**.

Now I hope you noticed that I skipped a phrase in the text.

with thanksgiving

If you want an interesting word study, study this word. Thanksgiving. Then add all of the synonyms. And you are likely to be shocked how many times this single thing is commanded in the New Testament. Why might that be?

What happens when you begin to think about things that you are thankful for?

Well, you stop, for at least a few seconds, thinking about that which you **want but don't have** or **have but don't want**. And what is your mind directed to? That which **you have** and **you want** and that which **you don't have** that you **don't want**.

Remember when we talked about how much is changed when you get a child who is brooding to change his focus?

Wrong perspective is often the **greatest detractor** from our joy. We are thinking about all of the wrong things. We are **selfishly fixated** on something that God does not **want us to have** at that moment.

Gordon Fee has some very insightful things to say about thanksgiving.

Lack of gratitude is the first step to idolatry (Rom 1:21). Thanksgiving is an explicit acknowledgment of creatureliness and dependence, a recognition that everything comes as gift, the verbalization before God of his goodness and generosity. If prayer as petition indicates their utter dependence on and trust in God, petition “accompanied by thanksgiving” puts both their prayer and their lives into proper theological perspective. Thanksgiving does not mean to say “thank you” in advance for gifts to be received; rather, it is the absolutely basic posture of the believer, and the proper context for “petitioning” God. Gratitude acknowledges—and begets—generosity. It is also the key to the final affirmation that follows.

I don't think any of us can ask the question- “What do you have to be thankful for?” and not fill a long list quite quickly. We used to ask this question on Thanksgiving while driving between grandparents. Carla would write the answers as the kids called them out. We always filled at least two columns of the first page of a letter sized paper. It was usually more than that. We still have them. There were things like forks, and grass, and dolls and all kinds of things. But they were all legit. They were all gifts of God to us.

Most every morning part of Carla and my morning routine is to ask each other, what are you thankful for. We try not to repeat ourselves. And that is not very hard. God has given us so much. But we spend so little time in our lives determining to think about those kinds of things. I would challenge you to ask your spouses and your kids regularly (or whoever you fellowship with), what are you thankful for. It transforms their minds and changes their focus, at least for a minute.

And if you have nothing else to give thanks for, then focus on the main event. There is always that.

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NKJV)

15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

OK let's move on.

7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

We have already spoken some about the peace of God.

That is the target. That is the state of being that comes about as we **pray to God**, **trusting** His character, **asking Him** for what we think we need, **talking to Him** about our situation, and **thanking Him** for not only what He has already **given to us** but also **thanking Him** that our whole situation is couched in **His loving provision** to us.

I cannot help of thinking of Suz and Jarrod, when it seemed the worst thing was going to happen, that they still trusted God. And God displayed His goodness and lovingkindness in such a remarkable way. This immediate result is not always the outcome. But God's displaying His lovingkindness and giving us good gifts is **always the outcome**, even when those good gifts are wrapped in **tragic wrapping paper**. We know that His plans for us are always good so in everything thing that happens we can have that mindset of **thanking God** for those things that we can see to thank Him for.

This resulted in peace where they were able to receive the comfort of being OK with God even when they could not wrap their heads around the situation that God had placed them in.

There is a peace that comes from God. It is a peace of having right relationship, being in right fellowship, and it is feeling the result of **both** of those things. It is the place where we say that **it is well with my soul**. It is the place where we are most productive spiritually. And we continue to see God in His proper light. I am sure Suz or Jarrod could tell you that they did not do those things perfectly nor without failures. But they did them **substantially**. And that is a huge deal.

Think about this. They could have lost those months of uncertainty in their lives in utter despair. They could have been driven to all kinds of wrong things. And all of those things would have been a waste of time, because **God had in mind** a plan much better than they would have ever predicted. As far as men were concerned, the future was bleak. But when God is involved, we trust and wait. He does amazing work in the face of catastrophe, one way or the other. We **ask** and we **talk** and we **pray to God** while thanking Him for His **past** work in our lives and His **future** promises for our lives. We trust. And we look to Him. And we have peace.

which surpasses all understanding

I think what this is saying is that this peace will be beyond all the capabilities of a human's ability to create. Our human understanding cannot take us to this place. A self dependent human will never get here apart from God.

This peace is different than the world can create. Because it is rooted in a reality that is even **more certain** than the physical reality we can experience. This peace we have is rooted in **a right relationship with God** into which we are continually invited an intimate fellowship. There is no peace in the world like it. The best the world can get is the peace of a **good circumstance** or the peace induced from an illusion of **one's imagination**. The world cannot have a Christian peace. They cannot get there with their understanding of things.

Our understanding does not have to reach **what God plans to do**. It only needs to reach **who God is**. That is the source of the peace.

And that peace **will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus**

How does this peace guard our hearts and minds?

Maybe there are other ways. But think about it. What is this peace based on? Is it not based on a solid theology about **who God is**? Is it not based on the peace between **man and God** that Christ won for us. Is it not based on deciding to **trust our God** even when the devil says it is futile, even when the enemy taunts us with our foolishness to believe in God, even when our flesh rises up and says, this God sure doesn't seem to be taking a liking **to you** today.

So how will this peace protect us?

Because the peace is based upon our rock solid foundation of our belief in our Savior. That faith in Christ will protect us from any idea sent our way to destroy us. The idea that our foundation is firm in Christ, that nothing can separate us from His love, that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. That is the foundation of our peace. So all of those substantial foundations of peace are going to protect our hearts and minds. And our hearts and minds is where all the destructive ideas come **to** and **through**. I think we can think of it by either **the faith that brings** this peace with God or the **peace itself** will both protect us from all the plans the enemy has to destroy us.

And it makes sense that our peace would be beyond understanding. It is certain that this **God** that we believe in is **certainly** well beyond the limit of anyone's understanding.

Romans 11:33–36 (NKJV)

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

When our peace finds its foundation in the **person of Christ** and the **resources of God**, that creates something that no human understanding would ever be able to reproduce.

The focus on who we are in Christ is the **greatest protection** our lives can have. Thoughts that are accurately based upon **God's word** will truly protect us from **going crazy with worry**. It will keep us from allowing the Devil to drive us to **reacting** as if everything is out of control. It will drive us into **the safety of our Saviors arms**. That is why so many of the epistles start with this theology. A list of things to do will never bring us peace. It is **who we are in Christ**, and **living congruently** to that truth that brings us peace.

I hope this has been useful to us this morning. We are so blessed to have the **God of peace** and the **peace of God** available to us this morning.

Will we face this week with a resolve to run **to** God in everything?

Will we take the **cure** that Paul lays out here for those **anxious thoughts**?

Will we orient to **who God is** and how **trustable God** is to take care of us?

Will we take time out to **thank Him** for **who He is** to us and what **He has done** for us?

Will we maintain the peace between us in God in our fellowship with Him so it will guard us from thinking and doing all kinds of evil.

That is the opportunity we face and that is the wonderful resource we are provided with this week.